

Have you heard that flu is on the rise?

What is influenza (also called flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs. It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

Signs and symptoms of flu

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- Fever\* or feeling feverish/chills
- Cough
- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Muscle or body aches
- Headaches
- Fatigue (very tired)
- Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

\*It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

The CDC website offers these tips. Most are common sense, but it never hurts to be reminded.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- If no tissue is available, encourage the students to perform the "Dracula" cover by coughing into the inner elbow of their long sleeves.

If the student is not wearing long sleeves, advise them to tuck their chin on their chest and cover with the front neckline of their shirt.

\* If you are able to see their nostrils, the covering is not correct.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.

- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)

- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.

Flu-like symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue. Some people also may have vomiting and diarrhea. People may be infected with the flu, and have respiratory symptoms without a fever.

You may want to go over these prevention tips with your children. In fact, please, please, please go over these tips with your kids. All the reinforcement can only help and we all would love to avoid the flu!

#### Period of contagiousness

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day before symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days after becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

#### How serious is the flu?

Flu is unpredictable and how severe it is can vary widely from one season to the next depending on many things, including:

- what flu viruses are spreading,
- how much flu vaccine is available
- when vaccine is available
- how many people get vaccinated, and
- how well the flu vaccine is matched to flu viruses that are causing illness

For more information visit the CDC web site.

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/keyfacts.htm>